

**Jeremy Quin MP**  
Minister of State for Defence Procurement

D/MSU 4-6-2-1

12 May 2021

Dear Cllr Manning

Thank you for your correspondence of 26 March 2021 and I acknowledge your emails dated 21 January 2021 and 23 February 2021 concerning the closure of Ash Ranges Firing Complex. I would be very grateful if you could correspond with me on Ministry of Defence (MOD) business at this address rather than via my constituency parliamentary email. This will aid us providing appropriate responses in a timely manner.

Unfortunately, as you know, the MOD has been forced to restrict access to a small area of Ash Ranges in order to protect the range complex technical areas. The Ash Range complex has, I am afraid, been the subject of vandalism. Having reviewed the data since 2015 the costs currently sit at £164,434 with 15,336 range hours<sup>1</sup> lost over that period. The extent of the criminal damage and the costs to rectify were escalating annually: in 2019 it was £34,315 and 6,128 range hours lost (up from £2,430 and 0 range hours in 2015) in the period Jan 2020 - Mar 2021 this has been reduced to £8,016 and 1,124hrs with damage to the perimeter fence and signs accounting for half the incidents.

While the costs associated with vandalism inside the range complex areas have significantly reduced, I am afraid they have not been eradicated. I include a photo of the latest damage to a troop shelter which has not yet been repaired (and associated costs are therefore not yet included in the figures).

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<sup>1</sup> One lane closed for one day = 8 range hours lost.

Cllr Nigel Manning  
Chairman  
Ash Parish Council

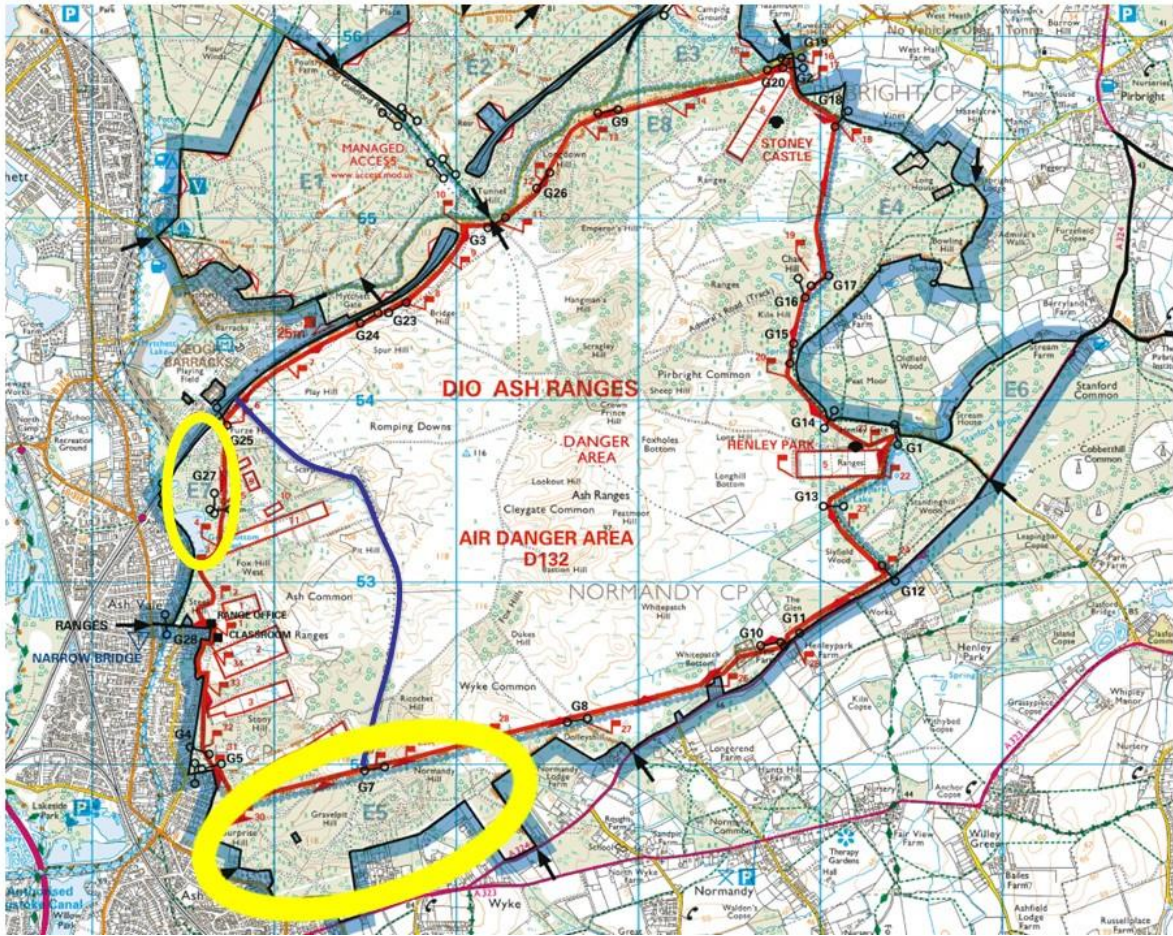
Email: [Nigel.manning@ashpcsurrey.gov.uk](mailto:Nigel.manning@ashpcsurrey.gov.uk)



The Department's concerns about securing the complex are not solely restricted to vandalism and its associated cost (both directly financial and in lost training). The Ministry of Defence has a duty of care to members of the public who use the land for leisure, as we do to our service personnel. A number of risks have been identified including the significant drop from the range complex gallery to the concrete floor below.

I fully appreciate the strength of opinion on the issue locally but it has become impossible to justify retaining an open space and the associated risks that this may entail while at the same time losing training hours and paying to repair damage inflicted by third parties. This is especially the case with the remainder of the range area open for public use when military training is not taking place. The DIO is putting measures in place to provide better access to this area. Work has already been completed on footpaths to provide members of the public with a woodland walk, which is permanently available even when ranges are live. This work has ensured a continuous route between the extensive woodlands comprising area E7 and which includes the water feature known as the Flash and a popular canal sidewalk and area E5 to the south, this again will be permanently available even when the ranges are live. Whilst I am sure you are aware of the areas I refer to I include a highlighted picture for completeness.





In addition, the route will provide access to the wider Range Danger Area (RDA) which comprises 88% of the total of Ash Ranges and is open to the public when flags are down, and no live firing is taking place. As funding allows, it is planned that further works will complete the 'Ash Great Loop' which is designed to run external to the range perimeter fence, although still on MOD land, and will provide an uninterrupted permissive route of over 8 miles. It is also intended that in due course this will be linked to the Pirbright Great Loop which will enable an uninterrupted route through extensive woodland and over rolling heathland totalling some 17 miles.

I am sorry that Defence has come to the conclusion that we could not in the circumstances continue to keep the range floor open. However I hope you will note our ongoing commitment to ensuring public access to what is a substantial open space.

Yours sincerely,

**JEREMY QUIN MP**